

Flying Wildcats Soar to 1943 Grey Cup

By Brian Snelgrove. Photos courtesy of "The Spectator"



Seventy years ago much of the world was locked in the most devastating war in the history of mankind. The Second World War had passed the halfway point with no relief in sight.

Against this backdrop the Hamilton Flying Wildcats took to the field before 16,423 fans at Varsity Stadium in Toronto to face the Winnipeg RCAF Bombers in the 1943 Grey Cup.

The Flying Wildcats were founded in 1941 to fill the void left by the Hamilton Tigers who had folded as many of their players had departed for military service. The club nickname was in recognition of the many members of the RCAF that were on the team.

The Wildcats had finished first in the ORFU with a record of eight wins one loss and one tie. They advanced to the championship game by virtue of a 7-2 victory over Toronto



Balmy Beach in the ORFU Final and a 7-6 win against the Quebec champions Lachine RCAF in the Eastern Final. The Wildcats were led by Head Coach Brian Timmis (who had been a member of the Hamilton Tigers 1932 Grey Cup championship team) and future Hall of Famer Joe Krol.

In the first quarter a nine yard run by Paul Peterson set up a one yard touchdown plunge



by Mel Lawson to give the Wildcats a lead they would never relinquish. The Wildcats led 18-7 after the first quarter and despite a late comeback by the Bombers held on for a 23-14 victory. "King" Krol had a royal day with a field goal, three converts and a single for Hamilton. He also threw a 30 yard touchdown pass to Doug Smith.

"Joe was a really nice guy," says Peterson the only surviving member of that historic team. "He had a fluid movement. If anybody came to tackle him he just swayed away from them."

Winnipeg had 250 total yards to the Wildcats 165. Hamilton completed just two of 10 passes while Winnipeg could manage just three completions in 26 attempts. Jimmy Fumio had a touchdown for the Wildcats while Garney Smith and Jim Berry each had a major for Winnipeg.

Peterson, now 92, was a 22 year-old running back in 1943. "We had about eight players that were in the Air Force and a few in the Navy as well," says Peterson. "I was in the reserve and worked at The Ontario

Die Company in Kitchener. We made parts for the war effort. I worked from seven in the morning until five at night and then went to practice. Games



were on the weekend."

"I played the whole game both ways," says Peterson. "I carried the ball a few times but was mostly effective on defense. We did well in the first half but just sort of held on for the rest of the game. They were a pretty tough team. Not that big but husky. It was a tough game. We were the underdogs."

"We had two rooms at The Royal York Hotel to change into before the game," Peterson adds. "We took a bus to Varsity Stadium and came back after the game and celebrated with coca-cola back at the hotel."

Future Hall of Famers Jimmy Simpson and Len Back were also on that championship team.

Note: This past season the Hamilton Tiger-Cats paid tribute to the Flying Wildcats historic 1943 Grey Cup victory by donning replica jerseys for their game against the BC Lions in Guelph, Ontario on September 7. Perhaps the ghosts of Wildcats past helped the present-day Tiger-Cats to a 37-29 victory. Paul Peterson attended the game with his son and other members of his family.

